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THE BOLSHEVIKI IN SIBERIA

*By E. A. Yarrow*¹

Siberia is so much in the public eye these days that I thought you might be interested in my observations on the situation. It is very difficult to give an orderly impression of conditions which are disorderly. If I might put the Siberian situation into one word I should say, *disorganization*, absolute disorganization, no matter from what angle one looks at it; political, social, economic, transportation, financial, and religious. Of course all these categories intermingle and overlap each other until their boundaries are lost but it may make for definiteness if I take each one up separately, and the one which is most apparent everywhere and which the people feel most keenly is the

ECONOMIC DISORGANIZATION

I noticed in Siberia the same condition that I found in the Caucasus, the almost total absence of manufacturies; and I suppose the causes are the same, the insecurity of capital invested in the provinces and the difficulty of getting protection for these industries from the Petrograd government. There seems to have been an influence emanating from such centers as Moscow which kept in definite centers the raw materials needed in industry. While the transportation facilities were in working order this did not do any great harm except in adding to the cost of manufactured

¹ Mr. E. A. Yarrow has just returned from two months in Siberia. After spending two weeks in Vladivostok, he was placed in charge of a Sanitary Train on the Trans-Siberian Railroad which took Red Cross and Medical Units with medical supplies to the front. Mr. Yarrow has had an excellent opportunity of studying Siberian conditions all the way from Vladivostok to Omsk.

articles, but when transportation ceased the result was tragic as the raw materials were left on the hands of the manufacturers and they could neither sell them nor use them themselves. During the first years of the war Siberia was the least troubled section of Russia, since it produced great supplies of foodstuffs and there were still stocks of manufactured articles for which they could exchange them; but as time went on these stocks were depleted with the result that prices went higher and higher and with them rose, of course, the prices of the necessities of life. At present it is almost impossible to buy shoes, clothing, implements, or medicines. Shoes cost from \$30 to \$100 and a suit of clothes from \$100 up. It is not difficult to figure out how much a farmer must sell his butter and eggs for in order to cope with these prices. But the farmer class is not the one which is hardest hit. The general report is that they have more money than they know what to do with and tie it up in bundles and weigh it out. This of course is an exaggeration but there is some truth at the bottom of it. The class that is hard hit is the wage earner. The raise in his pay is nothing commensurate with the soaring of the prices of what he eats and what he wears, and the crippling of trade makes his services less indispensable. There is possibly enough food in Siberia to feed the population but there is nothing to buy it with and no way of distributing it. Some sections have plenty and at fairly reasonable rates while a town one or two hundred miles away will be nearly starving. Apart from agriculture, the principle source of the wealth of Siberia is its mines, and here again it has been very badly disabled. Before the Czecho-Slavaks took control, Bolshevism was as rampant in Siberia as in any other part of Russia and the mines were taken over by the workers and the owners were lucky if they got off with a whole skin. At present I believe the owners have regained control but owing to the demand for high wages, the high cost of material, and the lack of transportation, the mines have ceased to be paying investments.

In short, the present economic situation is bad enough to account for much of the trouble in Siberia but unfortunately there are many other knots in the tangle.

FINANCIAL DISORGANIZATION

One could hardly realize the tremendous importance which a stable currency holds in the life of a people, until one sees the confusion into which the lack of it has thrown the Russians. One is bewildered with the different kinds of money one has to handle in any ordinary transaction. There is the old Nikolaeff or "good" money which is worth about 20 per cent of its original value; then comes the Kerensky or "bottle label" variety which gets its value from no one knows where; next the money issued by different provinces or cities with no backing whatever. While I was in Omsk, the Omsk Government issued some millions also without any backing, and a day or two after the issue was made the Government fell. Postage stamps have been converted into currency by the simple process of stating the fact on their backs; coupons from much depreciated war bonds are another prolific source for ready cash; and the final and most astonishing forms are the individual issues by banks, restaurants, commercial houses and private individuals! Metal currency in the form of gold, silver, or copper has simply ceased to exist. The effect of this confusion is to paralyze all forms of trade. Even if a producer has an article which he could sell he would rather hold it than convert it into paper, concerning the value of which he rightly entertains the gravest of doubts. One of the very greatest needs of Siberia today and the one in which it can be helped only by outside nations, is that of *goods*. It has money, of the variety mentioned above but no sane merchant will agree to furnish materials in exchange for such trash.

The banks remain open but the only individuals darkening their doors are those who made deposits years ago and are now using every art of persuasion and threat to get them back again.

TRANSPORTATION DISORGANIZATION

There is only one railway line through Siberia, including the military loop to the North along the Amur river; and previous to the war this road, although run on antiquated

methods, still met the needs of the country very well. Considering the tremendous distances, it will at once be seen that the very life of the whole region depends on the efficient upkeep of this means of communication. The thing that most astonishes the student of Siberian affairs is the fact that in spite of all the changes that have taken place, most of them for the worst, the road is still running. This is a tribute either to a splendid organization of former times or to the loyalty of the men employed. Too much cannot be said in praise of the engineers and trainmen who have stood by their jobs in spite of all sorts of dangers, inadequate and unpaid wages, and the constant influence of Bolshevik propaganda. When I came through the latter part of November the men beyond Irkutsk had not had any pay for three months, and about 3,000,000 roubles were due them. This neglect was beginning to tell on their morale and there was grave danger of the whole road being tied up by a strike. The head of our train was very anxious to get back to Vladivostok at the earliest date possible and he had to frequently "jolly" the station master with presents of cigars, money or other commodities. It took us about twenty-four days from Omsk to Vladivostok although in ordinary times it would have taken nine or ten days or possibly less.

The rolling stock is in the worst possible condition as very few repairs have been made since the war began. There are between two and three hundred American engineers located on the Manchurian line from Vladivostok to Manchuria station. They were invited over by the Kerensky Government, I understand, but the Government changed before they were able to take control, and although they have been there for about two years they have never been able to do anything officially. They are now acting in an advisory capacity but the officials of the road use their own judgment in accepting any suggestions they make. One great difficulty as everywhere in Siberia is the grafting by high officials. If the Americans suggest improvements whereby economies may be practiced they run up against some high official who has some interest in keeping things as they are.

The most serious problem is the falling off of revenue. No general freight is being carried and the passenger service is all but abandoned. Thousands of box cars are being kept out of commission by the fact that they are being occupied by refugees who live in them for weeks and weeks, and no one seems to have the initiative or authority to put them out. Practically all of the activity of the road consists of hauling troops, supply trains for the Red Cross and Y. M. C. A., and all sorts of so-called "Missions" of investigation. As far as I know none of these organizations pay a cent for their transportation. A great number of trains are being used to carry Czech soldiers, Japanese, French, British, Italian, and Chinese. I have understood that the Americans pay when they ship troops, but this very rarely happens as they stick pretty close to Vladivostok which is about 4000 miles from the front. The principal activity of the Allies seems to be "investigating." Train after train of some special Commission goes by and when they have gone the length of the road and back their information is so stale and the situation is so changed that another "Mission" has to be sent out. It seems as if anyone can get a special car or a special train if he is insistent enough. At Irkutsk we found an old Scotchman who had worked his way through from Petrograd. He had commandeered a box car and raised the British flag over it and chalked in large letters on the sides, "British war mission," and he was getting away with it! We hitched him onto our train and brought him to Vladivostok with us. The Red Cross and Y. M. C. A. would each have three or four special trains going at one time on different sections of the road. One can imagine the attitude of the trainmen working these trains! When I left the Red Cross was considering seriously the question of supplying these men at least with clothing but as yet, as far as I know, this has not been done.

POLITICAL DISORGANIZATION

One has only to review the progress of events in order to be persuaded how absolute is this disorganization. *After* the Allies had occupied Vladivostok the citizens of that town

elected a Bolshevik mayor; and when the Czech General Gaida was made a sort of military dictator General Horvath, a Russian, refused to accept his authority in the Harbin district. With the formation of the Omsk Government it was thought that a stable Government had been established, but before the Powers had time to recognize it, this authority also was superseded by the Dictatorship of Kolchak, and at the present writing, Semenoff, operating in the Cheta region, withholds his allegiance and it is only the restraining influence of the Allies that keeps them from going at each others throats!

The great difficulty seems to be that there are no disinterested politicians in Siberia. Each individual seems to be out for something personal. Under the old system there was a considerable leeway left for the play of "legitimate graft" whereby each official supplemented his salary by some sort of "rakeoff." This system was so ingrained into the people that it has been impossible for the present officials to free themselves from it, with the result that whatever the new governments do they are always subject to the charge of dishonesty.

Since the Bolsheviks have been driven out the conditions have been getting steadily worse economically; couple to this the fact that a large portion of the people are Bolshevik at heart, it is not to be wondered at that a minority at least sigh for the good old Bolshevik days. There have been many signs of Bolshevik reaction but they are always put down with a heavy hand, but the spirit is here nevertheless.

The absence of any settled Allied policy further complicates the situation. They do not seem to have gotten together on any settled principle and some of the nationalities are working at cross purposes. Dozens of times the railroad has been on the point of being turned over to the American Engineers, but then someone held up the arrangement. The Japanese are the ones whose purposes are the most open to suspicion; there seems to be no doubt that they have designs on the northern part of Manchuria, and consequently do all they can to keep the Americans from getting control

of the railroad. There is any amount of secret diplomacy being carried on but as yet no one has called for an open "show down."

SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION

The social life of Siberia bears no resemblance to what it was before the war. Hundreds and thousands have fled from Russia proper to take refuge here, and naturally they are not of the Bolshevik turn of mind, but rather lean to the bureaucratic type. They are made up of old Government employees, army officers, owners of estates, university professors, and wealthy merchants. The sad thing is that they do not seem to have learned anything from the cataclysm that has overwhelmed their land. Instead of studying the underlying causes for the tremendous hold Bolshevism has taken on the masses, they simply look at its present manifestations, which are horrible enough in all conscience, and then their souls are filled with the one desire for revenge. Bolshevism has been discredited on account of its evil minded and dishonest leaders, who have led the movement into all forms of foolishness, cruelty and excess, but the man is very shortsighted and unwise who maintains that there is nothing higher behind it. In its essence and as the common Russian peasant or worker sees it, it is a tremendous protest against the real injustice and cruelty which he has suffered for ages at the hand of the capital classes. This is the fundamental reason why this movement has held on so long and been so tenacious of life; and the individual, or group, or government which refuses to take this point into consideration will have a hard time of it.

There is quite a strong tendency in Siberia today toward the reestablishment of the monarchy and there are many indications that if it is established things will be run very much on the old lines. When I was in Tomsk I was told on good authority that a threatened uprising of the peasants had been subdued in the good old fashioned way; by the use of the knout and indiscriminate executions. Society is divided into many factions each bitter against the other, none wishing to learn where his own philosophy could be changed

for the better or his methods of life modified, and each one filled with hatred of the other, only waiting for an opportunity to do some violence to the one who disagrees with him.

RELIGIOUS DISORGANIZATION

In normal times the Orthodox Church was second in influence only to the Government itself; in fact it was an integral part of the Government, and as is almost certainly to be the case of such establishments it was controlled by the influences which closely coincided with those dominating the old bureaucracy. It is needless to say that the Church is anti-Bolshevik, but it probably would have been opposed to any democratic movement on the part of the common people even if such a movement took a moderate course and did not manifest itself under such hideous forms as the present uprising. The Russian people are essentially religious by nature and while all other organizations have been attacked, there does not seem to have been any definite menace to the Church itself except that it has been disestablished. While there has been no concerted assault on the Church yet in numberless individual cases pillage, intimidation, and personal violence have been committed. Be the cause what it may, the Church which has been one of the great steadying forces in Russia, has lost its hold on the people. They claim that it has always stood for reaction and has been and is today more sympathetic toward the upper classes than toward the lower.

Wherever the Jewish influence dominates the Bolsheviks, the Church of course cannot expect sympathy or good will. This problem of the Jewish influence among the Bolsheviks should be mentioned. Undoubtedly many of the leaders are Jews gathered since the revolution from all over the world; rightly or wrongly the classes of Russians who are now suffering, attribute a large portion of their misfortune to Jewish intrigue. The Jew was never loved by the Russian but this hatred has become greatly intensified lately and if ever the upper classes get control again, there will be absolutely no place left for the Jew in Russia.

THE CZECHO-SLOVAKS

The history of the Czecho-Slovak intervention is so well known that there is no need of going into details, except to recall the fact that they were going through Siberia on their way to the French front when they were held up by the Bolsheviks and compelled to fight. They were then held in Siberia by the Allies who made them all sorts of promises which they haven't kept. They are at present in a very dissatisfied mood. They feel that the war is over and they are very anxious to get home to their families and to the great task of rehabilitating their country. They cannot leave without the consent of the Allies as this would endanger their whole future national aspirations. Their military accomplishments have been simply marvelous but they themselves acknowledge that the morale of their men is weakening. If they should withdraw there would be simply pandemonium let loose. Probably a considerable portion of the population would be murdered by the Bolsheviks who would immediately overrun this region. The forces the Allies have in Siberia today are insignificant and their position would be untenable were it not for the presence of the Czecho-Slovaks, but these have lost a considerable number of their men from sickness and fatalities in battle. When the spring opens—taking for granted that the Bolsheviks will still keep up their organization—they will need more aid from the Allies than they have received up to the present if they are to hold out.

CONCLUSION

When conditions are so very bad, and the issues at stake are so very serious as they are in Siberia today, it is very difficult to suggest a remedy, but it seems self-evident that the two alternatives open are for the Allies either to withdraw or stay on.

It would seem practically impossible for them to withdraw, as their doing so would simply turn the country over to a terrible orgy of destruction and bloodshed. There are some who claim that the purpose of the intervention has

been accomplished, viz. the saving of the Czechs, the protection of the large military stores from falling into the hands of the Bolsheviks, and the holding up of the large forces of German-Austrian prisoners who were being organized to form a new German Eastern front. They ignore the fact that although all these objects have been accomplished, yet by their very accomplishment the Allies have been compelled to take upon themselves new and almost more important duties, namely, the protection of the people who have taken refuge within their lines, and the establishment of some secure protecting government for both these refugees and the original inhabitants.

All my observations and the result of all my conversations with individuals who know the situation thoroughly, make me feel most strongly that the only thing to be done is for the Allies actually to intervene, not as they have done in the past, but with an intervention that will be effective.

The first thing necessary is for the Allies to adopt some settled policy. At present no one seems to know what they are doing or what they wish to do. There is an endless stream of ludicrous "Missions" of investigation going up and down the line and no one with power to act on the information which has been gained! It is quite evident on the surface that the different powers have not the same goal toward which their various activities are carrying them.

The second demand is for political stability and this cannot be secured until Siberia is really occupied by sufficient military forces to guarantee this stability. It seems useless to expect this power to originate with the Russians. Since I have been writing this letter a report has come from Omsk, the seat of the Siberian Government, that a Bolshevik uprising has taken place in which certain troops of the newly organized Siberian Russian army participated. The report states that they released the prisoners, the larger portion of whom were Bolsheviks, and that the uprising was put down "with severity" thereby no doubt adding to the already bitter class feeling.

The third demand is for a stable currency. Nothing on a very extensive scale can be done for the economic regen-

eration of Siberia until a medium of exchange is established which will have a real and permanent value, which will not depend, as does all the money now in circulation, on some lucky turn of the wheel of fortune or some beneficent arrangement of the Allies which will take place some time in the indefinite future. The Allies will either have to stand back of this issue or else take over some public utility which will be able immediately to at least carry the interest on the loan and eventually pay up the principal.

And this leads to the fourth demand: actual control of the Trans-Siberian Railway. The country cannot steady down until this vital travel artery is restored to normal activity and it cannot be restored by any local physician. The Road must be renovated from one end to the other. There must be authoritative control so that it will be made a source of revenue as well as the feeder for the people and industries of this vast region. At present it accomplishes neither purpose. And without the military occupation it would be useless to make the attempt.

Siberia is a wonderful country and has a splendid future before it but unless the Powers intervene with some drastic measures, its progress will be delayed years if not for decades.